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A CENSORSHIP OF THE CENSOR

by

Alexander Campbell

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A Censorship of the Censor

By Alexander Campbell

WHILE the "Final Rally to avert Conscription" is taking place it may be said that one of the most urgent of other duties is the reform of the Censorship as now exercised. The Censorship is discharging its functions improperly and has become a grave menace to the successful prosecution of the war.

A Censorship of news relating to the military operations is necessary. There is universal agreement upon that point. But an institution which runs amuck in non-military spheres, suppresses opinion, garbles telegrams, and emasculates popular poetry, is an institution which is better quickly destroyed in this country. Can the Censorship be put into its proper place? That all-important question can only be determined by pressure of public opinion, led by newspapers. Parliament no longer exists as a critically co-operative assembly. It has degenerated into a state of gross servility. The House of Commons might as well conduct its pantomime in dumb show. Every awkward question is either evaded or shelved, and only a handful of men sustain these dutiful burdens which membership of the House of Commons imposes. The newspaper Press and public opinion ought, therefore, to deal with the serious peril of the Censorship—that is to say, a Censorship which abuses its privilege and its trust as ours has done. An exclusively "military" censorship we must have, but nothing more.

Those responsible for the conduct of newspapers might seriously consider the possibility of inaugurating a Censorship of the Censor as a first means of limiting the advancing powers of the Press Bureau, and by rousing public opinion secure a necessary statutory limitation of its sphere of power. A scheme might be drawn up which would effectively counter the encroachments and the usurpations of the Censorship. For, let it be remembered, this is a

necessary work. If we are to win this war success will not come out of the atmosphere of mystification and bewilderment (and falsity, one is tempted to add) which enwraps everything. Wherever you are, when the Censorship gets hold of the wheel Truth has often a "bad passage." It is beside the mark to blame newspapers for the present reign of darkness and distraction. If they had had a free hand instead of the footling people of the Censorship we should have learned the truth. In these times newspapers are not masters in their own house. They are only permitted to publish what the mind-readers of the Press Bureau determine is fit for communication to the supposedly invertebrate and hysterically inclined British people. It is general knowledge that the secondary function of the Press Bureau is to suppress all news calculated by its officials as likely to depress the public, and a theory sound enough to a degree in certain circumstances has been hardened into a dogma. What appears in the Press, therefore, represents the judgment not of skilled journalists but is a preserve made in the confectionery works of the Press Bureau. Those who are weary of the jam supplied by this department of State must address their complaints to the manager.

A distinguished military historian—a very shrewd judge of things—remarked to me the other day that the Censorship, as exercised in this country, had acted disastrously in every way. It has usurped functions which do not properly belong to it. Nobody disputes the proposition that a censorship of news dealing with military (and naval) operations is necessary; but beyond that there is no need for Censorship. Why should opinion be suppressed? Why should a great nation be almost restricted to a diet of half truths? From complaints which have appeared in newspapers it seems to be clear that the Censorship has suppressed honest neutral comment when it has been adverse to our noble selves. All that is "comfy," sweet, dainty, and favourable receives a great blaze of publicity; all that is the opposite is escorted into oblivion. Anything more mystifying in the realm of news than the published accounts of the recent Greek crisis I cannot conceive. To judge by the comment in the Paris newspapers French journals were all along in possession of the main facts; in Great Britain the news permitted

publication was such a jumble that editorial opinion was bewildered and lame. That is only one illustration. It is enough to say that the general impression in England is that all neutral States love us and are supremely confident that we shall win this war. This picture, based upon newspaper reports "passed for publication," hardly corresponds with the facts. One fails to see for what intelligible reason the Press Bureau has only permitted a chorus of congratulatory neutral praise to be heard in the land.

The institution of a Censorship of the Censorship such as I have in mind would be speedily followed by the elimination of the soothing syrup article by the "military expert." Our "military experts" have served up the most amazing nonsense under the guise of sober truth. The prophecies of some of these gentry have been staggering in their falsity. They have piled absurdity upon absurdity, yet to-day "experts" continue to enjoy a queer popularity. One of these, who a year ago had decimated the German Army with his own statistical battalions, still serenely deploys his tabulated columns in terrific onslaughts upon the foe. And there are others whose grotesque assertions are so palpably unreal that the sane person wonders if they were written in Cloud Cuckooland. A Censorship of the Censorship would confer a boon upon the nation if it agreed to suppress in the most ruthless manner the periodical cackle of those who see nothing in a British or a Russian reverse but a subtle plan of the Entente "higher command," or a grave embarrassment to the victor. It is obvious that the truthfully candid article of the military correspondent type cannot be expected from men who are not allowed to witness operations at close quarters, and that a balance sheet of results, so to speak, would be firmly "sat upon" at the Press Bureau. Informed and informative estimations of the situation must not be hoped for. Correspondents of British newspapers have paid flying visits to the "front" (as distinct from the "back"), but their writings leave the darkness as opaque as ever. Presumably they have to make the best of the situation in every way.

It seems singular that the Government should have made the difficulties of the Press as burdensome as possible and that it has not taken editors into its confidence. Would

a Censorship of the Censorship bring about a desirable alteration in these relations? It seems probable. The lives of the people of this country are not the toys of the Government to play with as fancy dictates, and people are beginning to question where formerly they quietly acquiesced. They think that the stereotyped answer of the interests-of-the-State-demand-silence species has been sadly overworked. It needs a rest. People are also a little sceptical about the official *communiqués*. They are beginning to tumble to the truth of the matter, that military *communiqués*, very frequently, are far from being a complete canvas. Yet the colours are agreeably disposed. The explicit announcements made in the *communiqués* of the Entente are, no doubt, accurate, and they are not fabricated after the enemy fashion. When the Entente announces successes through its various headquarters the results are not imaginary or exaggerated. All that is wanted is Truth all round, complete and candid.

This ground it is necessary to traverse in order to support the case for a Censorship of the Censorship. How can that be best brought into being? By an organisation of journalists which would censor news released for publication, and destroy all of suspect veracity. All the vapid nonsense, the inane and the false, would be thrown overboard. The dreary stream of lies from Copenhagen and Amsterdam, to mention two places, should be dammed. It would, in short, defeat the plans of those at the Press Bureau who look upon themselves as *entrepreneurs*, as people with a specific mission to "cheer up" the multitude.

I have seen a suggestion that newspapers should combine and defy the Censorship. The method is not clear, but I gather that the proposal would be for newspapers to publish important despatches (not relating to military matters) even when forbidden publication by the mandarins of the Press Bureau. It is difficult to see how such a scheme could be put into effective operation. The Government might reply (for the Government is deeply committed in this queer game of national hypnotisation) by holding up all telegrams until the Censor had given them his august *imprimatur*.

A Censorship of the Censorship is the better way out of the dilemma. The Press has supported the Govern-

ment in dark hours, but the Government responds with threats, suppressions, and prosecutions. This arrangement is really too one-sided, and until it is amended newspapers might well consider their special position. The enormous sums of money which newspapers have saved the nation by the gratuitous circulation of appeals from many Departments of State for help of all kinds represents a generosity which has been ill-repaid. Newspapers have loyally served the nation and the highest national interests, and to continue that splendid work it must subdue the ever-growing pretensions of the Censorship. It must fight this body in the highest interests of the national existence. Parliament will do nothing. It seems to have lost power and prestige. Moreover, as I understand, it hates the Press—except at such times as General Elections. At any rate, I read that the House of Commons cheered when Mr. McKenna announced the imposition of higher telegraphic rates for the Press, and that the cheers were representative of the disfavour with which the House of Commons regards newspapers. If this be correct it shows how mischievously the Censorship is operating, for the news in newspapers is officially passed for publication. If it is untrue or false the grievance should be communicated to the manager of the Press Bureau. It is he and his advisers who have determined the complexion of news. He does his best according to his lights, but his function is to suppress, and he never errs on the side of generosity. He looks at everything from the official point of view; I have been looking at the whole subject from the public point of view, which in the ultimate is vastly more important.

The title, "A Censorship of the Censor," is perhaps somewhat misleading, but it contains the best crystallisation of what I have in mind. Clearly, it could have unofficial status only, but it would embody the journalistic desire not to be participants any longer in the sorry business of duping the public. All news could not be subjected to its review; but it could proceed upon certain agreed lines and in accordance with a certain set of principles. It would be a Vigilance Committee of a new kind, but for once would not meddle with morals. It would deal with all official announcements upon their merits. (I do not refer to official *communiqués* of operations.) It would

not desire to harass the Government; the sole justification for its existence would be anxiety about the operations of the Censorship in "inducing" an unwarranted optimism and ignorance. This Vigilance Committee would not, on the other hand, forcibly feed the nation upon a diet of groans, recriminatory accusations and innuendo. It would endeavour to keep from public consumption adulterated news food of all descriptions. That such a body would not be too cordially welcomed I have no doubt; it will be far better if the Government reforms the Censorship.

We must get on with this war, and we shall not get on with the business until the Censorship is dispossessed of powers which it is now wielding in abuse of an understanding with the State to the serious hurt of the nation's interest.

P.S.—Since the foregoing was written there has been a slight improvement in the liberation of all kinds of news by the Censorship, and Sir John Simon is understood to be at work upon the machinery of the Press Bureau to secure some improvements. The whole subject should be thrashed out finally, and Sir John Simon would be well advised to take into conference the editors of all the leading newspapers in the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister should be present, and there should be a full, free and private discussion of the whole subject of the Censorship. If the Government and the Press can compose their differences by conversation the better for all concerned. The Government does not boggle about appealing to the Labour Party when in difficulties with industrial and social subjects; why should it not take the Press to its bosom in the same way?

Jan 1916

The Chemical Industries of Germany

By Henry L. Heathcote, M.Sc.

". . . all the pure and noble arts of peace are founded on War . . ."
"War . . . the foundation of all great Art."
". . . you *must* have war to produce Art."
—RUSKIN, in "The Crown of Wild Olive."

TRUE, perhaps, of Italy, but not so of Germany. There war engendered Chemistry. That their chemistry, born of war, should now be serving in their ranks is as natural as it is inevitable. That this chemistry has long been "On War Service" is perhaps not so well known; but the history of chemical industry makes it certain at almost every turn of the page. True, its childhood was innocent. Germany had her alchemists not less than other countries, perhaps rather more, for their claims and fables appear to have received greater credence in Germany than in other countries. Böttger, a German alchemist, is reported actually to have produced gold in the presence of witnesses. Thereupon, we are told,* the two most powerful reigning monarchs in what is now Germany began to covet the person of the said alchemist. These were Frederick the Great and the Elector of Saxony. Through the agency of the Elector Böttger was beguiled to Dresden, seized, and detained. Here, after many fruitless attempts to make gold and many successful attempts to harden clay vessels by baking, the foundation was laid for the now world-famed Dresden works. This factory produces a brand of porcelain (often miscalled china), which has found its way into the homes of people all over the world. Indeed, at one time it was a mark of Culture to be the possessor of a Dresden shepherdess or other article of Dresden ware.

This factory flourished so greatly that Frederick the Great, with that interest in chemical industry which the monarchs of Prussia have so consistently manifested, decided to make porcelain at Berlin, and set the Court

* Professor P. F. Frankland, F.R.S., *Soc. Chem. Ind. Journ.*, 1915, p. 307.

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